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Abstract

Governance of health care: retrenchment and convergence?

Health care is one of the core social citizenship rights in all European countries. Recently social policies have been subject to pressures from global market forces, the budgetary and financial restrictions of the European Union, the negative demographic development and high unemployment levels. Cost containment and creation of further space for market production activities are recommended. Health care policies constitute no exception in this respect.

We will in this paper compare the development of health care policies in Europe during the last decades from a social citizenship perspective with regard to retrenchment and as a result possible convergence. Recent research has focussed on changes in transfers, i.e. social insurance and social assistance, and found few instances of convergence. Comparative analyses of changes in services, the other pillar of social policy, have however so far been limited to a few countries. We identify the main analytical dimensions of health care service, namely coverage, financing and provision. The two hypotheses of retrenchment and convergence in any of these dimensions of health care service will then be subject to empirical tests in a diachronical cross-national analysis. The base for the analysis is OECD data covering 19 EU countries for the years 1980-2006.

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